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ABSTRACT

This essay outlines Mexican immigration to the United States, with particular reference to Mexican children and the implications for schooling. The ability of Mexican immigrants to obtain jobs and the nature of the work itself has changed drastically for the worse in recent years. Children of Mexican origin differ in numerous ways in part because of the diverse background in legal status (illegal versus legal resident, and the naturalized citizen), length of stay in the United States, and the intermarriage status. Mexicans usually migrate to the United States for economic reasons. The migration itself involves great risk, stress, and financial investment. Most immigrants have had few years of schooling, an agrarian upbringing, and a small-town lifestyle. The experience of rural Mexicans with their country's educational institutions is marked by uncertainty and distrust, although parents show much deference to teachers. Newly-arrived immigrant children face a cumulative process of adaptation to living in the United States. Teachers usually find immigrant children more cooperative than Mexican-American children who, reared in the United States and under the influence of the "Mexican" stigma, tend to see immigrant children negatively. Large gaps are found between the American youth culture and traditional views of Mexican parents. The following factors can enhance the ability of the teacher to intervene successfully in the educational development of recently arrived Mexican children: (1) outreach programs; (2) resource groups and organizations; (3) knowledge of familial and social networks of the child; and (4) shared information among teachers concerning the instruction of immigrant children. (KS)

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MEXICAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS: A BRIEF SKETCH

ALEX M. SARAGOZA, PH.D.

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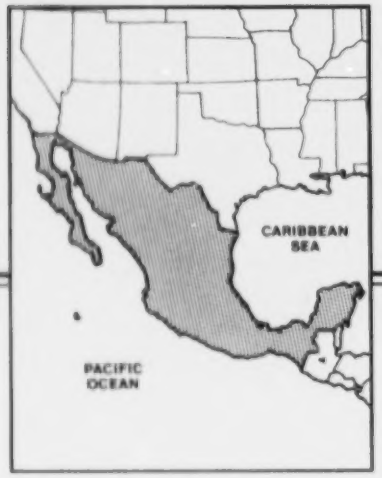
Mexican Immigrant Children in American Schools: A Brief Sketch



By Alex M. Saragoza, Ph.D.

Introduction

Fear often marks their appearance, a sense of embarrassment frequently accompanies their entrance. Their halting English and Spanish accent betrays them as recent arrivals. Another Mexican immigrant child becomes a student in an American school. For many teachers, it is an uneasy moment, especially if they cannot speak Spanish themselves. Questions arise, but often remain unspoken, locked behind tense smiles and frequently phrases of welcome: What's your name? Where are you from? The newcomers sit and lower their eyes, seemingly timid if not intimidated, yet stealing glances at brightly papered walls, cluttered desks, smudged blackboards, and at the wary looks of inquiring faces.

The arrival of immigrant children has been a part of American history since its beginnings. It is, then, an old story that has become embellished with images that few Americans fail to recognize, images enshrined in the symbolic meaning of the Statue of Liberty. Yet, it is also a new story, unlike that of other previous immigrant children. The world into which immigrants now enter is not the same as that of children, for example, who came from Ireland, Poland or Italy in the 19th century. And, equally important, the world from which new immigrants come differs greatly from that of their European counterparts of a century earlier.

For Mexican children, there is no ocean to cross to enter the United States. Whereas child labor was a possible fate for many European immigrant youngsters 100 years ago, most Mexican children today have relatively few opportunities to work alongside their parents or to become wage earners. Indeed, the work of immigrant adults — the parents of these children — has changed dramatically. Industry, manufacturing, and mining absorbed the labor of a large proportion of European immigrants. Particularly in the Midwest and the East, the industrialization of America took place largely as a result of the toil of European-born workers. Not surprisingly, immigrants and their immediate

offspring became the backbone of the union movement, and they fought successfully for better wages and conditions. Within a generation or two, significant numbers of European immigrant workers were well-represented in the unions of industrial labor, earning better wages than their non-union counterparts. In the late 19th century and into the 20th, immigrants proved to be a vital resource to the rise and expansion of the American industrial economy.

For recent Mexican immigrants, getting jobs in industry has become increasingly difficult. Prejudice against Mexicans continues to hinder their mobility. More important, in the last 10 to 15 years, the labor of Mexican immigrants has been critical to the economy. Today, the U.S. economy requires different kinds of cheap, unskilled labor. The monotonous making of circuit boards, wiping tables, cooking fast foods, sweeping floors and tending yards absorbs much of the labor of recent immigrants. With unions in decline and with American manufacturing stagnant, immigrants today enter a very different labor market than their predecessors of a century earlier. A recent report to Congress noted that more than 80% of the new jobs created in the United States since 1970 were in the service sector, rather than agriculture or manufacturing as in earlier eras. The service sector typically involves unskilled, low-paying jobs with limited mobility. There are exceptions, but in general Mexican newcomers' job prospects are bleak. And there are few signs of improvement. Only the barren possibilities of employment in Mexico drives Mexican immigrants to accept the restricted opportunities of the United States.

In short, the imagery of past immigrant experiences cannot be extended easily onto the present. Even the expression of prejudice has changed. In the mid-19th century, anti-Catholic sentiment led to the formation of a distinct political movement, the so-called Know Nothings. Later, legislation excluded Chinese immigrants from the United States. Such overt, organized expressions of prejudice against specific immigrants have not taken place today. Still, bigotry remains, often incipient, hovering near the surface — an inarticulate, amorphous resentment among many Americans. Sadly, in some cases resentment boils over into acts of violence. More often, however, the resentment is expressed indirectly: the support for the "English-only" legislation, the criticism of bilingual education, the call for "immigration reform," in the emphasis on the "costs" of provided public schooling to immigrant children.

The contemporary Mexican immigrant enters a more complex situation than in the past. The former context — of the 1920s, for instance — though harsh, was much more clearly understandable. The clarity of segregation, the visibility of separation by ethnicity and status gave a simplicity to social relations often missing in schools today. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the nuances of relations among schools, Mexican American students and *recien llegados*, i.e., recent immigrants. This triangular relationship is not

uniform. It varies in subtle and not so subtle ways in light of several factors and contexts. South Texas is different from Chicago, and Los Angeles contrasts greatly from a small rural town in Central California.

Schools differ in the composition and attitudes of their students, faculty and administrators, and their "place" in communities. Similarly, children of Mexican origin differ in numerous ways in part because of the diverse backgrounds of Mexican immigrants. Some children of Mexican descent can trace their roots in this country back five generations; many others have been in the United States less than five months. Some speak Spanish fluently, others are monolingual English-speakers. Some frequently eat "Mexican" food, yet many others prefer "American" cuisine. Some prefer Spanish-language media, while others enjoy American television despite their limited language ability. And an increasing number of "Mexican" children — those with Spanish surnames — are in fact children of "mixed" parentage. Exogamy is rising among the Mexican- origin population. Thus, who is a "Mexican" child, who is a "Mexican American" youngster, who is a "recent immigrant" are questions with no simple answers. What we are left with are loose definitions, impressions and unclear social boundaries.

Hence, children of recent Mexican immigrants arrive into a thicket of perceptions that too often are inaccurate or misinformed. These perceptions may be overtly hostile, or vaguely so. Some expectations may be highly positive, others well-intentioned but misguided. In this sense, Mexican newcomers present a challenge to schools as well as a dilemma. They challenge society's stated aim of integration, equity and justice that was symbolized by the extravagant celebration of the renovation of the Statue of Liberty on July 4, 1986. Nonetheless, uncertainty mars the optimistic visions that surround the "Lady" at the entrance of New York Harbor. As voices call for the end of bilingual ballots and condemn the use of Spanish in American daily life, these children from Mexico suggest a basic problem of acceptance — for us and for themselves.

We must keep in mind that these children also make choices; they confront decisions and select alternatives. How society treats them influences their choices, but cannot dictate their decisions. The question is whether our influence — particularly that of the schools — will help make their choices wiser and better, or disappointing and bitter.

This essay outlines Mexican immigration to the United States, with particular reference to children and the implications for schooling. In this brief paper, generalizations must be made. But it is crucial to understand that such general statements are at best simplifications of complex and subtle processes. This introductory section, however, suggests the complexity of this topic, a topic that has occupied the ire and attention of academics, policy-makers and public opinion. It is hoped, nevertheless, that the reader will appreciate the depth and breadth of this subject and its significance for school and society. For

the exacting reader, a selected bibliography is included that will elaborate certain points, add to the information here, and extend the arguments contained in this essay.

IMMIGRATION'S IMPACT ON ONE TOWN

Chavinda is a small town in the rich agricultural valley of Zamora in the state of Michoacan, southwest of Mexico City. Every day, usually in the morning, the post office clerk puts up a list of letters waiting to be picked up. And every morning passers-by stop and stare at the list, looking for their names or those of their friends. The ritual, now over thirty-years-old, began when the *braceros* left the area for the fields of the American Southwest. *Braceros* (a term used for those involved in the guest-worker program between the United States and Mexico) from the valley of Zamora learned after their sojourn in the United States the benefits of earning dollars and the availability of work.

The *bracero* program was seductive, pulling men from wives, mothers and families. Begun in 1942, extended repeatedly after World War II because of alleged "labor shortages," the *bracero* program in fact created a strong gravitational pull that grew over time. Pressed for income, squeezed by inflation and pressured by large families, men, especially young males, sought to return to the United States within or outside the bureaucracy of the *bracero* program. At first a trickle, by the 1950s the migration of men from Chavinda and surrounding towns became a steady stream. The points of destination usually reflected where "beachheads" had been established: a former work site initially known through the *bracero* program, or where an uncle or older brother had found work, or where rumor indicated a great demand for cheap labor. At first they gravitated to agricultural labor, not surprisingly given their agrarian background and the agricultural focus of the *bracero* program. But they soon entered other types of jobs; it did not matter. Finding work, making money and sending money orders were the only reasons for leaving Mexico. Three to six months or so they labored, returning by December, and then, once again going *al norte* in the spring.

It became a ceremony: a cycle of departures and returns, tearful goodbyes and joyous welcomes. Young couples married often near Christmas, the trappings of their weddings inflated by dollars earned the previous summer working in the United States. In the spring *los hombres* left again, some carrying pictures of expectant wives and newly established homes. Now, lines at the long-distance telephone office, especially on Sundays, reveal the extent of Chavinda's losses to the "north" — every ring means a commotion, the operator's call brings smiles to someone on the line, but for others the apprehension continues, often through the day and into the night. For some, a grueling day of milling around the office, asking someone to listen for their name to be called while they go home to cook for the children, only to return to sit and wait. Was he

caught by the *migra*? (The term *migra* is used often to denote Border Patrol.) Did he have to work? Is he okay — he might be sick? Maybe there is no phone easily accessible? Or is he with someone else . . .? Letters are social occasions, friends and family stopping by, wanting to know the contents of letters often brief, the scrawled writing and misspelled words indicative of little education and even less confidence in the use of the written word. For others, the day comes when an entire family leaves, or decides not to return, leaving behind friendships, memories, and a way of life.

BASIC QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

THE CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Migration is an international phenomenon, an indication of dislocations in the global economy and/or in the international political order due to wars, famine, civil strife, or a combination of forces and events. Nonetheless, the movement of Mexicans to the United States holds — and has held for over a century — certain special characteristics and aspects. The enormous discrepancies in the two countries' economies fuel the migratory flow toward the United States. Mexico is an underdeveloped nation that in a cruel twist of fate sits next to the world's premier economic power. Nowhere else do two such vastly different national economies share a common border. Moreover, Mexican migration to the United States occurs in the distinctive historical context of the U.S.-Mexican relations, not the least of which has been the large and controversial presence of American investment in Mexico.

The sources of Mexico's underdevelopment and its current deteriorating economic health, however, cannot be explained entirely by the historic consequences of its exploitation by foreigners, notably American capitalists. Some of the blame rests with the economic planning of Mexico's dominant political party, especially since the 1940s, and particularly the policies pursued from the 1960s through the 1970s. These policies, it should be emphasized, facilitated the expansion of foreign, e.g., American, economic interest in Mexico. Space does not allow a detailed analysis. Suffice to say that Mexican migration to the United States cannot be simply reduced to a failure to Mexico's economy. (See bibliography for references on the origins of Mexico's economic problems in recent years.)

THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

The decision to migrate is surrounded with difficulty, stress, risk and, in recent years, great dangers. Migration requires a huge financial investment for most Mexicans. Raising the money for bus fare or air fare is a major undertaking; the loss of income to the family of the departing member also must be considered. The drain on savings for

support of dependents is yet another financial problem. Much tension is involved, as they must worry about crossing the border. Those with papers can never be certain that their documentation will be acccepted by a Border Patrol or immigration official under public pressure to "control" the U.S. border. For the undocumented, stress becomes risk of failure, of "wasting" all of the energy and funds to cross the border, of returning empty-handed, humiliated and subject to ridicule. Tremendous pressures and responsibilities burden most immigrants. Their desperate and repeated attempts to cross the border indicate not only the desire to work in the United States, it also signals their determination not to fail, not to forsake their sacrifices and those of others. Migration for most immigrants is a grim task, a combination of fear and hope.

This essay uses imprecise terms — most, many, large numbers — to describe recent immigrants. Such terms reflect the fact that the exact number of immigrants in this country is unknown. Complicating this lack of accurate information that there are various types of migrants: commuters as well as transitional and settled immigrants.

As the name implies, commuters go back and forth across the border frequently regardless of their legal status. The majority of commuters are males, usually young, single or recently married with very young children. Transitional types are those who have been in this country longer, three to five years, often with children born in the United States, and tied to well-defined networks both social and occupational. They tend to stay in the United States, taking occasional trips back to Mexico, rarely longer than one to three months. Their children attend public schools, and older ones becoming interpreters for the family's encounters with English-speaking institutions. Settled immigrants are those with more than five years in this country and who are on the way to becoming "Mexican American." They tend to return to Mexico only for special reasons, e.g., weddings or serious illness or death among extended family, or close friends. Such immigrants are often functionally bilingual; their knowledge of English is sufficient for work and other necessary tasks. Their homes are likely to be filled with conversations mixing English and Spanish, the parents preferring the mother tongue and the children, especially the younger ones, using English with increasing frequency.

The legal status of the immigrant influences the frequency of his or her movement across the border. Other factors are also important, such as whether they have a job assured upon return to the United States. Mexican immigrants come to this country both documented and undocumented, or, in colloquial terms, legal and illegal. "Legal" can mean having a "green card," a permit to work in the United States or possessing permanent-resident status, i.e., the right to live in this country without the rights of citizens. Some immigrants have become naturalized citizens. Undocumented immigrants are those without any of these "papers."

The immigrant's legal situation holds various implications. Undocumented people are subject to apprehension, with sudden and obvious consequences for children. But if the children are born in the United States, they may not be deported with their parent(s) if there are relatives here legally who are willing to take care of the children. Often an undocumented parent gets caught by the Immigration and Naturalization Service without the knowledge of his or her spouse and children, which practically guarantees that the immigrant will attempt to return to his or her family. Visa holders (green carders) come and go frequently between the United States and Mexico, and their children are likely to accompany them. Permanent residents tend to travel to Mexico less often, especially as the children become adults, or after a long period of residence. And the acquisition of citizenship usually leads to a weakening of active ties with Mexico.

Who is an immigrant, then, is not an easy question with a simple answer. The number of immigrnts who enter this country each year is even more difficult to determine. Estimates run from 3 to 12 million. Clearly, though, recent immigrants are bringing their families here in larger numbers, and there has been an unusual rise of young women coming from Mexico on their own, with and without children. (The economic crisis in Mexico has led to a rise in the desertion of wives and families, forcing women to seek alternative sources of income, including through migration.)

There are three main destinations in the United States for Mexican immigrants: California, Texas and the Midwest, especially metropolitan Chicago. The schools in these receiving communities contain a disprotionate number of new immigrant children. Not surprisingly, in these areas the controversies surrounding the schooling of Mexican immigrant children are intense, at times contributing to ancillary issues, e.g., the "English-only" initiative in California.

THE BACKGROUND OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

The overwhelming majority of Mexican immigrants are not the poorest of the poor of Mexico. Most must gather resources for the trip north; crossing the border might cost more than $500 — a small fortune in Mexico. Many immigrants may be small farmers, or members of an agricultural collective *(ejido)*, or skilled or semi-skilled workers. Few years of schooling, agrarian upbringing and a small-town lifestyle characterize the backgrounds of most Mexican immigrants. Relatively few come from large cities such as Monterrey, Guadalajara or Mexico City, although many may go from their rural towns to an urban center and then move on to the United States.

Historically, central Mexico has supplied the largest proportion of Mexican immigrants, though recently southern Mexico, and northern Mexico — because it is so near the border — have sent significant numbers. Mexico's current agricultural crisis fuels the

migration from rural areas. The densely populated, agrarian-based central plateau of Mexico, especially the states of Jalisco and Michoacan, is a major source of immigration. The general economic crisis has intensified influx because in certain parts of Mexico, unemployment and underemployment is 60% or more.

The experience of rural Mexicans with their country's institutions is marked by uncertainty if not distrust. Schooling in many parts of Mexico continues to be a privilege. During the rainy season in Chavinda, for example, buses often cannot pass through mud-choked roads. Thus, children cannot get to school. In many areas children must pay for travel to school, or walk. And the schools often charge even for paper and pencils. For many parents, schools are strange places; their notions of homework are remote, and their understanding of the importance and meaning of education is affected by their own uneven schooling. Expectations for their children seem correspondingly low; the idea of "college" or "university" remains tied to people with wealth and social position. Hence, although most immigrant parents show much deference to teachers, their attitudes toward school often contain ambivalence and/or insecurity.

In Mexico, as in many agrarian cultures, repetition or memorization characterizes learning. Student intitiative and independence are at odds with a context where tradition, patriarchy and authority continue to punctuate the ideals fo social life. Public life, however, can be very different from private behavior. But discipline, obedience and restraint still carry much weight with Mexican immigrants. Thus, the "timidity," "respectfulness," and "manners" of recent Mexican immigrant children reflect a socialization where public behavior is indicative of parental responsibility. Misbehavior is seen as a sign of parental failure — *es malcriado* (he or she has not been reared well). This is not to say, of course, that immigrant children are always well-behaved and obedient, but such ideals remain highly promoted in Mexican homes. These social expectations for immigrant youth held important considerations.

THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTMENT

Few immigrants arrive without contacts. As a result, immigrant children, particularly those under 14 years of age, enter a social network that inevitably leads to them attending school. In some cases, of course, children must somehow negotiate alone the first, scary encounter with an American school, showing up at times as a group, the oldest leading the way, the younger ones trailing, possibly on the brink of panic.

These children bring with them a reservoir of perceptions and knowledge that reflect their place of origin and upbringing. They are acquainted with U.S. products and popular culture. Pato Donald (Donald Duck), *hamburguesas*, "Kentucky" (fried chicken), Colgate (pronounced colgahte) and other aspects of American life are not unknown to

many immigrant children. Nonetheless, they find life in the United States different, and for some, dramatically so. Compared with Mexico's windowless classrooms, old desks and peeling walls, U.S. schools generally appear extremely modern, clean, even awesome with their cafeterias, gyms, courts, showers, grass fields and sports equipment. Not surprisingly, things "Mexican" quickly pale in comparison. And, over time, memories of Mexico diminish in the glare of a shining, glossier, "better" world in the United States. The attitude change — a preference for things "American" — is fraught with confusion, occasional pain and sometimes shame.

For recent immigrants, adaptation to living in the United States is a *cumulative* process. Each encounter, each problem, each resolution provides a reference point for future actions. Mistakes made one time are remembered, and usually avoided. For the undocumented, daily life exudes a sense of defensiveness. They avoid institutions, evade contacts with strangers, and stick to safe routines; unanticipated visitors or correspondence may cause anxiety and fear. Suspicion marks the life of many, if not most, immigrants. Much is at stake, for children and parents alike, where their very sense of identity is apt to be a liability rather than an asset. Thus, social service agencies, hospitals, law enforcement officers and the like are more likely to be shunned by immigrants than to be called upon in time of need. Unfamiliar surroundings tend to provoke feelings of inadequacy to meet unforeseen circumstances. Understandably, immigrants often seek intermediaries in their encounters with unfamiliar institutions and/or representatives.

For newly arrived immigrant children, the amenities of U.S. schools are generally impressive. Their attitude toward teachers and instruction is usually open, nearly naive at times (unless children with greater experience have predisposed them toward a more negative stance). Indeed, their lack of hostility or diffidence may be in stark contrast to Mexican American or Chicano youngsters whose socialization has led to a degree of estrangement, if not resentment, toward schools. It is not unusual to find teachers whose initial perception of immigrant children is punctuated by positive comments, including comparative statements, usually in favor of *immigrant* Mexican children as opposed to Chicano/Mexican American kids.

Mexican American children, those reared in the United States, tend to "see" immigrant children negatively, at times with sharp antagonism. This is particularly true of older children and adolescents. Jerome Kagan, the Harvard child psychologist, has noted that most children realize their social identity early on in their schooling. Much of that sense of social importance for children derives from their parents. Children are well aware of whether their parent(s) "count" in the hierarchy of social standing in American society, *but their reference of status is learned in the United States,* i.e. in American terms. Children of poor, badly educated parent(s), therefore, may have a fragile sense of self-worth, a

weakness in self-confidence that too often worsens over time rather than improves. As children near adolescence, this sense of self-esteem becomes an element of identity.

For many young people from poor backgrounds, their sense of identity is extremely brittle, easily broken and difficult to sustain without some prop or crutch, be it drugs, gangs, alcohol or the urgent intimacy of an intense, desperate moment of sexual embrace. For such young people, the sting of class prejudice is layered with elements of racial difference, the stigma of being "Mexican." In this respect, recent immigrants bring attention to being "Mexican." The glaring obviousness of the immigrant — speech, mannerisms and dress — put them at odds with a vague, inarticulate sense of frustration/alienation/resentment felt among many Mexican Americans. In short, Mexican American/Chicano youth are apt to be embarrassed by recent immigrants as yet another source of uneasiness, even shame.

This estrangement that occurs, with varying intensity, between Chicano youth and recent immigrants exacerbates a feeling of separation, particularly among newly arrived adolescents. The trappings of American adolescence, so celebrated and entrenched in this country, has no parallel in Mexico, especially in rural areas. Adolescence in rural Mexico is a short span between childhood and the grinding responsibilities of adulthood. We are accustomed in the United States to a youth culture: separate sections at department stores (a.k.a. "Tiger," "Jaguar" shops and similar euphemisms) that pointedly tell adults to stay out; commercials tailor-made for teen-agers (note the difference in advertising techniques and products for various TV shows); the long years of schooling set aside for young people, spanning from junior high school to junior college and sometimes beyond (notice the rituals involved, e.g. proms, after-game dances, cruising). This youth culture is new to Mexico, largely restricted to urban, middle- and upper-class youth. The teen-age culture has failed to penetrate deeply the daily life of rural, poor young people.

Nowhere does this "gap" appear more painfully than in notions of gender roles. The sexualization of American youth culture is visible and pervasive: the erotic undertones of commercials; the casualness of accepted teen-age attire; and the overt, sexually charged displays of affection ("making out") in schools.

Such forms of expression have yet to affect Mexican society as greatly as our own. The suggestiveness in advertising for American youth has few parallels in Mexico. What we may find "teasing" seems brazen in Mexican terms. What Americans may describe as brief running shorts for young women would be scandalous for many Mexicans; and what we would dismiss as typical teen-age ardor would seem extreme by parents reared in the conservative tenor of rural Mexican life. The issue is not whether such

perceptions are "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong." Rather, we must grasp the meaning of these differing views concerning sexuality and youth. This issue becomes particularly poignant for young immigrant women.

Young Mexican women reared in their country's traditional context quickly perceive the distinctiveness between gender roles in the two societies. This puts great pressure on recently arrived Mexican adolescent females. For some the choice is one of withdrawal and denial. Others, attracted by the seeming liberty of their American counterparts, attempt to behave like their U.S.-born peers, an alternative that parents eye with apprehension, if not disapproval. In short, for recent immigrant young women, the cultural dilemmas extend beyond the expected ones of language; they include a deeply personal dimension. An avoidance of sex and related topics continues to characterize relationships between most Mexican mothers and daughters. This lack of communication may be magnified in immigrant mother-daughter relations given the gulf that may arise between mother and daughter because of the latter's *accelerated adjustment to her new environment.*

Going to school, being younger, and facing new peer pressures make the exposure of young Mexican immigrant females to American youth culture much deeper and more rapid than for mothers who work (usually with other Spanish-speaking workers) or who stay home (often preferring Spanish-language media). In this sense the sexualization of adolescence in the United States generally has a greater significance for immigrant adolescents, especially females, than for most American teen-agers. And the meaning of such symbols and/or behavior is frequently dismaying to parents socialized in Mexico, where the exotic imagery of music videos and related forms of expression for youth are of very recent vintage and restricted accessibility. This "generalization gap" is not unknown to American parents, but the implications for immigrants, young and old, may hold consequences of a very different nature.

This is not to say that Mexican immigrants come to this country totally unaware of modern media representations. Mexican television, for instance, has been highly influenced by its U.S. counterpart. In fact, American products are often advertised in Mexico much as they are in the United States. Yet, if such images appear outside Mexico's urban centers, the fact remains that the tug of past practices, the pull of tradition, also persists. This incipient contradiction in the lives of Mexican youth becomes sharper in the United States with tense, if not conflictual results among parents and their adolescent children.

Reared for most of their childhood in Mexico, older children (ages 14 to 16) upon arrival tend to have a degree of immunity of resistance to the lure of American youth culture. This is especially true for males. For younger immigrant children (5 to 10 years) the

attraction to American culture builds upon their progressive incorporation — social, cultural and linguistic — into their schooling in this country. With this group, each passing year of school leads to a greater facility with English, an increasing exposure to American norms, frequent encounters with U.S. consumer culture, in short, a greater acculturation. Thus, in numerous and imperceptible ways, "gaps" occur between children and their parents, and even among siblings in terms of their levels of accommodation to American life *and in their reactions to such changes*. Hence, immigrant children carry within them emotional burdens of diverse types that one must consider in order to understand their school experience.

TEACHING AND MEXICAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

The following factors condition the experiences of immigrant children. Whether these services and/or capabilities are available at the school site may enhance — or lessen — the ability of teacher to intervene successfully in the educational development of recently arrived Mexican children.

1. OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Schools with large numbers of immigrant children should consider training all personnel to be extensions of the efforts of teachers. Teachers should be able to reach parents through Spanish-language radio, television and newspapers and bulletins and newsletters published by social service agencies serving the Spanish-speaking population in the area.

2. RESOURCE GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Related to outreach, school officials should seek ways to furnish teachers with a directory or guide to community service organizations. Such a guide could include contacts at churches attended by recent immigrants such as the priests or ministers of those churches; the names of media contacts, e.g., a sympathetic radio announcer on the local Spanish-language radio station; local representatives of Mexican American organizations; relevant departments and/or professors of local colleges or universities that might be able to provide students for short-term translating or teacher aide duties; the name of a contact at the local legal aid society; for children with special education problems, the name of the Spanish-speaking social worker at the closest Regional Center for the Developmentally Disabled. Teachers should have access to these and other such resource people in the community.

3. KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL NETWORKS OF THE CHILD

Children usually belong to a network of social relations that can be called upon for information about the children when and if necessary. Making contacts within these networks may enhance communication with parents. Schools may consider training

"reception teams" that could ascertain from recently arrived children information concerning their years of schooling in Mexico, attendance at schools in other areas, etc. Such "teams" could be used to learn whether a child is the oldest or youngest (or in between) among their siblings and their respective exposure to American schools; to know whether both parents are in the United States and their occupations. (Older children, for example, who have parents that work at night, may have primary child-care responsibilities that result in adverse consequences such as sleepiness in school or incomplete homework assignments.) Such personnel also might be able to find the most efficient means of communicating with parents. Parents who are illiterate can hardly respond to notes sent home with the children even if written in Spanish. (Asking a parent, or perhaps the child, whether they correspond often by letter with relatives in Mexico would be an indirect way of knowing whether someone in the family can read and write Spanish.)

4. MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Mexican immigrant children are sensitive to their "differentness." In classrooms with a mix of U.S.-born and Mexican-born children, emphasizing Mexico too obviously or frequently in lesson plans may be counterproductive, an impediment to a child becoming a part of the mainstream classroom. In short, there are no hard and fast rules for teaching Mexican immigrant children. School administrators should allow teachers opportunities to meet periodically to share ideas, materials and lesson plans that have "worked" with immigrant children. The classroom teacher is usually the best source of information of what to do — and not to do — in the teaching of immigrant children. (Outside "experts" rarely have day-to-day experience in the classroom; their ideas may be helpful in a general sense, but they can rarely be "used" for an entire school year.) Nonetheless, whenever possible, school administrators should consider using researchers and consultants to aid teachers in dealing with the problems of teaching immigrant children.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is difficult in a brief essay to capture the complexities of the relationship between immigrant children and American shoools. Clearly, this relationship will persist regardless of whether our immigration laws change. Thus, the challenge will continue for teachers and administrators to make the encounter between child and classroom fruitful and a contribution to his or her successful integration into U.S. society. This is an enormous responsibility and task, made the more trying by financial constraints on our schools, and by public ambivalence (if not hostility) toward Spanish-speaking newcomers.

For countless immigrants throughout U.S. history, the schools have been a source of hope for a better future. It has become a cliché to commemorate the Statue of Liberty

and its symbolic meaning for our country. We have, in this sense, the opportunity to make the "Lady" in New York Harbor more than a symbol, to make her meaningful to the newest of our immigrants.

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